

Tempe Fire Department Policies and Procedures

Vehicle Lockouts

209.09

11-01-04

PURPOSE

To provide guidelines for responses to vehicle lockouts.

POLICY

The alarm room will dispatch a company to unlock a vehicle when they receive a call for a person or pet reportedly locked inside. A company will be dispatched whether or not the vehicle is running or if the air conditioner is operating or not. We will not respond to unlock an unoccupied vehicle or to gain access to retrieve keys or other possessions locked inside a vehicle. Persons requesting assistance for keys locked in their vehicle should be directed to contact a local locksmith or Tempe PD to request assistance from their customer service vehicle if available. We will respond (Code 2 AOI) if requested to assist in the removal of a pet from a locked vehicle.

PROCEDURE

Upon arrival at a vehicle lockout, the company officer will use his/her discretion as to the proper method of opening the vehicle. If the vehicle is not running, the child/person appears to be in distress, or with elevated ambient temperatures the crew should gain access to the patient utilizing the most expedient method possible. Typically this would mean using a pick head axe or window punch to remove a window to gain immediate access to the patient.

If the vehicle is running with the air conditioner operating normally, and if the child/person appears to be without distress the company officer can attempt other methods of entry for a **very limited period of time**. A reasonable attempt (a few minutes) should be made to find the vehicle owner prior to breaking a window or gaining access to a vehicle. Depending on the type of vehicle a coat hanger/Slim Jim may work almost as fast as the axe. However, in most new vehicles the coat hanger or Slim Jim is probably a waste of time and improper manipulation of these tools may result in potential damage to the paint, door locking mechanisms, or other expensive electronic equipment mounted within the doors. If a locksmith has been called or if a spare key is on the way (with a very short ETA), the company officer may elect to briefly wait for one of these options to arrive. If at any time the child/person appears to be in any distress, or if their health is potentially compromised in any way, immediate access should be made.

For companies that have the "Z Tool" or Air Jack Air Wedge System - an attempt may be made to unlock a vehicle using these tools only in stable situations in which the person is at minimal or no risk. Once again crews must limit their efforts in attempting to gain access to a minimal amount of time. If unsuccessful, crews should immediately revert to the first option (pickhead/window punch).

For incidents in which a person has been left in a vehicle for an unknown or potentially long period of time, it is imperative that we gain immediate access to the patient for rapid evaluation and treatment. The interior of a vehicle can easily exceed 180 degrees in a short period of time during the summer or other warm months. Temperatures at this level can obviously lead to dangerous or even fatal outcomes without immediate intervention to remove the person from the vehicle.

When we encounter pets locked in vehicles a reasonable attempt (a few minutes) should be made to find the vehicles owner prior to breaking a window or gaining access to a vehicle. If unable to locate the owner and if the pets' health appears to be in jeopardy, access to the vehicle can be made. A request for Tempe PD and animal control should be made to address the owner of the vehicle/pet and to evaluate and/or take custody of the animal.